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Effect of Raga Yaman on Mental Health Well-being : A case study during Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT :

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global mental health crisis, causing increased anxiety, depression, and emotional distress due to prolonged isolation, uncertainty, and health concerns. This case study investigates the therapeutic effects of listening to Raga Yaman, an Indian classical raga renowned for its soothing and uplifting qualities, on the mental health well-being of a 24-year-old female during the pandemic. The subject listened to 30-minute sitar renditions of Raga Yaman daily over 15 consecutive days. Pre- and post-intervention assessments using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A) demonstrated significant improvements in mood, anxiety reduction, and overall mental well-being. The study also highlights the subject's newfound interest in learning the sitar post-intervention, suggesting a lasting cultural and therapeutic impact. This research underscores the potential role of Indian classical music as a complementary therapeutic tool in managing mental health during crisis situations.

Keywords : Raga Yaman, Mental Health, COVID-19 Pandemic, Depression, Anxiety, Music Therapy, Indian Classical Music, Sitar

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, has profoundly affected all aspects of human life, especially mental health. Lockdowns, social distancing, and uncertainty about the future have led to a surge in anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders worldwide (WHO, 2020). As mental health services struggled to meet rising demand, complementary therapies, including music therapy, gained attention for their potential to alleviate psychological distress.

Music therapy harnesses the emotional and cognitive impact of sound to promote healing and mental well-being. Indian classical music, with its intricate raga system, offers a unique cultural and emotional experience. Among these, Raga Yaman stands out for its tranquil and uplifting nature. Traditionally performed during the evening hours, Raga Yaman employs a scale with tivra Ma (sharp fourth), generating feelings of peace and optimism (Deshpande, 2005).

This study focuses on exploring the therapeutic effect of Raga Yaman on an individual experiencing mild depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the constraints on in-person therapy sessions during this period, music therapy presents an accessible, non-invasive option for emotional support.

The objective is to examine changes in depression and anxiety levels following a 15-day daily listening intervention of Raga Yaman played on the sitar, including alap, jod, and jhala sections, and to explore the participant's subsequent engagement with Indian classical music.

Literature Review

Music therapy has been recognized as an effective adjunct treatment for various mental health conditions. Several studies have demonstrated that music can modulate brain activity related to mood regulation, reduce stress hormones, and promote relaxation (Sharma, 2017). The use of structured melodic frameworks like ragas offers targeted emotional effects due to their specific note combinations and performance styles (Patel, 2011).

Indian classical music's raga system is believed to evoke distinct emotional states or rasas. Raga Yaman, characterized by its major scale with a sharp fourth (tivra Ma), is traditionally associated with feelings of devotion, tranquility, and hope (Deshpande, 2005). Previous clinical research has linked listening to specific ragas with improvements in anxiety, depression, and overall psychological well-being (Patel, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, music therapy has seen increased usage due to social distancing and the need for remote therapeutic options. Studies suggest that music listening can mitigate feelings of isolation and emotional distress (WHO, 2020). However, few studies have focused on Indian classical music's role during this time.

The present case study fills this gap by examining the impact of Raga Yaman on an individual affected by pandemic-induced stress, using validated psychological measures and exploring the participant's personal engagement with the art form.

Methodology

Participant

The subject is a 24-year-old female experiencing mild symptoms of depression and anxiety, attributed to social isolation and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. She volunteered for this case study with informed consent.

Intervention

For 15 consecutive days, the participant listened daily to a 30-minute live sitar rendition of Raga Yaman, performed by the researcher. The performance included traditional segments: alap (slow melodic exploration), jod (rhythmic development), and jhala (fast rhythmic climax).

Instruments

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI): Used to assess the severity of depressive symptoms before and after the intervention.

Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A): Used to evaluate anxiety levels pre- and post-intervention.

Procedure

Baseline scores on BDI and HAM-A were recorded. The participant listened to the Raga Yaman session each morning in a quiet, comfortable environment. After 15 days, post-intervention scores were measured, and subjective feedback was collected regarding emotional and mental health changes.

Results

Quantitative Findings

BDI scores reduced by 40% post-intervention, indicating a significant decrease in depressive symptoms.

HAM-A scores decreased by 35%, reflecting reduced anxiety levels.

Qualitative Observations

The participant reported improved sleep quality, reduced feelings of restlessness, and a greater sense of calm and optimism. The jhala section was particularly noted for increasing energy and motivation, while the alap section provided deep relaxation.

Newfound Interest

The subject expressed a strong interest in learning the sitar after experiencing the therapeutic benefits of the music. She preferred to pursue Indian classical sitar training to maintain and deepen her mental well-being through active engagement with music.

Discussion

The study's results align with prior research on music therapy's positive effects on mental health. Raga Yaman's use of the tivra Ma and its melodic structure appear to foster emotional balance and mood elevation. The rhythmic complexity in the jhala segment may stimulate neural pathways associated with alertness and motivation, contributing to the participant's reported increased energy.

The intervention's timing during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes music's role as a non-pharmacological intervention accessible despite social distancing restrictions. The subject's desire to learn the sitar post-intervention suggests music's potential not only for passive therapy but also as an active, lifelong practice supporting emotional health.

Limitations include the single-subject design and lack of control conditions. Future research should involve larger sample sizes and randomized controlled trials to generalize findings.

Limitations and Future Directions

This case study's single-subject design limits broad applicability. Cultural background, personal music preferences, and the subjective nature of self-reported data also influence results. Future studies could explore varied ragas, different durations, and diverse populations to deepen understanding.

The potential for Indian classical music to be integrated into remote mental health care warrants further investigation, especially during global crises.

Conclusion

The case study demonstrates that daily listening to Raga Yaman can significantly improve mental health well-being during stressful times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The subject's enhanced mood, reduced anxiety, and interest in learning sitar highlight the multifaceted benefits of Indian classical music. This research advocates for further exploration of traditional music therapy in contemporary mental health practice.

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